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## Portable Pools Pose Drowning Risk

By [TARA PARKER-POPE](#)

Boys play in a wading pool.

Wading pools and larger portable pools have grown in popularity, but they also pose a serious safety risk to young children and lack the security features of larger in-ground backyard pools, new research shows.

The study, [published in the journal Pediatrics](#), provides harrowing descriptions of 209 backyard drownings and 35 near-drownings that have occurred in portable pools from 2001 to 2009.

While the total numbers may seem low, accidents involving portable pools claim the life of one child every five days during the summer months. In addition, the study reports only on submersion accidents reported to the Consumer Products Safety Commission and likely dramatically understates the total number of portable pool drowning deaths.

“In our opinion, we don’t think parents are paying the same attention to safety when they go out and buy a portable pool,” said Dr. Gary A. Smith, senior author of the study and director of the [Center for Injury Research and Policy](#) at Nationwide Children’s Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. “We want parents to understand these pools also pose a similar drowning risk for young children as in-ground pools.”

The researchers reported on accidents that occurred in water depths ranging from two inches to four feet. One accident involved a parent who fell asleep in a wading pool while holding a child. Other accidents occurred during lapses in pool supervision when a parent left to answer the phone or was distracted by yard work. Two 9-year-old girls drowned in an inflatable pool after becoming entangled in a pool cover. In another case, 3-year-old twins died after leaving their home undetected and jumping into a neighbor’s unsecured four-foot-deep portable pool.

Portable pools have become a popular and affordable alternative to expensive in-ground pools or stationary above-ground pools. Unlike the fragile, inflatable pools of the past, portable pools today are sturdy and large, including some that can be filled with as much as water as a small in-ground pool. Large wading pools typically cost \$100 or less, whereas very large portable pools can cost \$1,000 or less. By comparison, in-ground pools can cost \$30,000 or more.

The downside of portable pools is that they often lack the security fences and gates that most local zoning authorities typically require to surround in-ground and above-ground pools. Among

the portable pool drownings that were reviewed by the Pediatrics study, at least 47 could have been prevented if the pool had been surrounded by fencing.

Dr. Smith said the solution is a multilayered approach of education and additional safety features, like fencing, pool covers, removable ladders and pool alarms.

“Many of the protection methods and devices for in-ground pools are too expensive or not available for portable pools,” said Dr. Smith. “Manufacturers need to step up and try to help consumers by coming up with affordable and effective prevention devices.”

Dr. Smith said that educating parents is essential because many parents simply don’t understand how fast a fatal pool accident can occur, even in a small pool.

“The thing about drowning is that it’s simply different than most other types of injuries, because if you fall from playground equipment, you usually get another chance,” he said. “With drowning, it’s quick, it’s silent and it’s final. That’s why it’s so important to prevent these events from occurring in the first place.”

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